Thank you Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and members of the Appropriations Committee for allowing me this opportunity to submit this testimony on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2021.

I am Tracey Walker, the CEO of Journey Found a nonprofit providing residential, home based and other supports and services to adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities throughout north central and southeastern Connecticut.

I will be commenting predominantly on the Governors budget as it relates to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) but would also like to begin with a request for the broader nonprofit community. Years of budget shortfalls, cuts, rescissions and level funding have generated increasing pressure on nonprofits to continue providing essential services in the community with less resources. The need for services continues to increase as the sector’s financial support overall has decreased. The quality of life in Connecticut is vitally linked to the programs, services and offerings of Connecticut’s nonprofits. Please regard Connecticut’s contractual payment for nonprofit services as a priority and not a discretionary option.

In general, I am pleased that the Governor’s budget is supportive of services offered through the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). In particular, I support the proposed caseload growth for employment opportunities and day services as well as the corresponding increase in residential services in the DSS budget under Community Residential Supports. (The DDS residential line item was moved to DSS in FY17.) These services are important to preventing a gap in services for young adults leaving school and entering the adult service system as well as for families who have awaited services for far too long.

I also support the annualization of the DDS provider wage adjustments as enacted last session and implemented January 1, 2019. This wage adjustment requires a minimum of $14.75 per hour be paid to those working in DDS funded provider agencies and included up to a 5% increase for those staff making between $14.76 and $30 per hour. This has been a welcome increase, but the implementation has been disappointing. DDS underestimated funding required and has not provided the funds necessary to fully implement this wage increase resulting in providers receiving millions less than the data shows is necessary. This has resulted in allocations to providers that were calculated at two thirds of actual overtime rates, staff vacancy rates calculated at half the actual vacancy rates and needing to give less than 5% increases to staff that could have been eligible for this amount under the statute. There have
also been shortfalls in other wage related and covered costs such as pension plans and other benefits. I appreciate the show of support and commitment the legislature made in giving theses wage increases last year. I ask that you fulfill this commitment by allocating the funds necessary to fully funding the implementation of the increase.

I am concerned about the Governor’s proposal to slow down the conversion of state-operated services to the nonprofit sector and I encourage the Committee to fully continue the conversion process. A 2009 study from the General Assembly’s Program review & Investigations Committee reported that Connecticut could save $152,000 per person by providing services for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities in the community compared to the same services offered through the state. Our provider community offers quality care that equals and, in some cases, exceeds that provided through the state. This can be done without loss of jobs if planned over time and utilizing naturally occurring attrition in state employees.

Finally, it is important to note that the contracts Journey Found, and our colleague agencies, receive from the state are not simply for staffing. We have all of the other costs of delivering those services and doing business. We maintain homes, pay utilities at program sites and offices, purchase groceries, furnishings, supplies and provide transportation. These are costs that are not optional, yet we have not received contractual rates that increase to cover these costs. Indeed, we have not received contractual increases for these items in thirteen (13) years. The nonprofit sector has been expected to provide 100% delivery on contractual obligations without 100% payment from the state. I ask that you address this inequity.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Governor’s budget. My contact information appears below should you have any questions or would like additional information.

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